

Guevara's Really Dead, Castro Tells Cubans

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Special to The Star

MIAMI—Cuba began 30 days of official mourning today, after Prime Minister Fidel Castro told the nation in a sad, emotion-choked voice that Ernesto (Che) Guevara is dead.

The Cuban leader, in a two-hour radio-television speech last night, said reports of Guevara's death were "painfully true." He called it a "strong blow" to the Communist revolutionary struggle, but added, "the revolutionary movement continues forward."

"Imperialism can physically eliminate Che Guevara," Castro said, "but no one can ever eliminate his example."

"Contradictions" Cited

Castro said Cuba's Council of Ministers had decreed a national holiday, "the Day of the Heroic Guerrilla," for Oct. 8 each year. That, according to Castro, was the day his trusted aide and former minister of industries "fell in battle."

Castro dwelt at length on "contradictions" in the reports of Guevara's demise. Citing medical reports from La Paz, he said it appeared that Bo-

livian troops captured Guevara alive and wounded on Oct. 8 and "finished him off" the next day.

Castro's usual bombastic speaking style was missing. His address, monitored here, was delivered in a subdued tone, and his voice seemed to falter as he confirmed Bolivian government claims to Guevara's death.

Handwriting "Unmistakable"

Guevara's father and brother from Argentina were among the skeptics who had doubted his death because of discrepancies in the Bolivian reports. But Castro said that after seeing evidence, he was "absolutely certain, without doubt of any kind."

Castro said the first photograph from Bolivia that reached Cuba last Tuesday was not a good likeness of Guevara, a native Argentinian who had fought by his side in the Sierra Maestra a decade ago. Therefore, he assumed this was another in a series of false reports of Guevara's death.

But after viewing a second photo, Castro said, "we began

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to fear a little more that the news was true." A third picture, showing the entire body, clinched it, he said.

The Cuban leader added that his conclusion was based on more than just photographic evidence—for example, the "unmistakable" handwriting in the diary Guevara carried.

"At this moment," Castro said, "the discussion of doubts does not interfere with the fact of the death itself, but the form of death and the circumstances in which it was carried out."

Castro eulogized Guevara as a dedicated, heroic guerrilla fighter who showed "absolute contempt for danger." He suggested this attitude might have made Guevara careless about protecting himself.

He disclosed at the end of his speech that the Council of Ministers, which he heads, had ordered flags lowered to half-staff for 30 days and all public activities suspended for three days.

The Communist party Central Committee scheduled a memorial rally for Wednesday night in Havana's Revolution Plaza "to render tribute" to Guevara. It also named a four-man committee, including three members of the party's Politburo, to take charge of all memorial activities.